

Child TRENDS FACT SHEET

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CONDOM USE AND CONSISTENCY AMONG TEEN MALES

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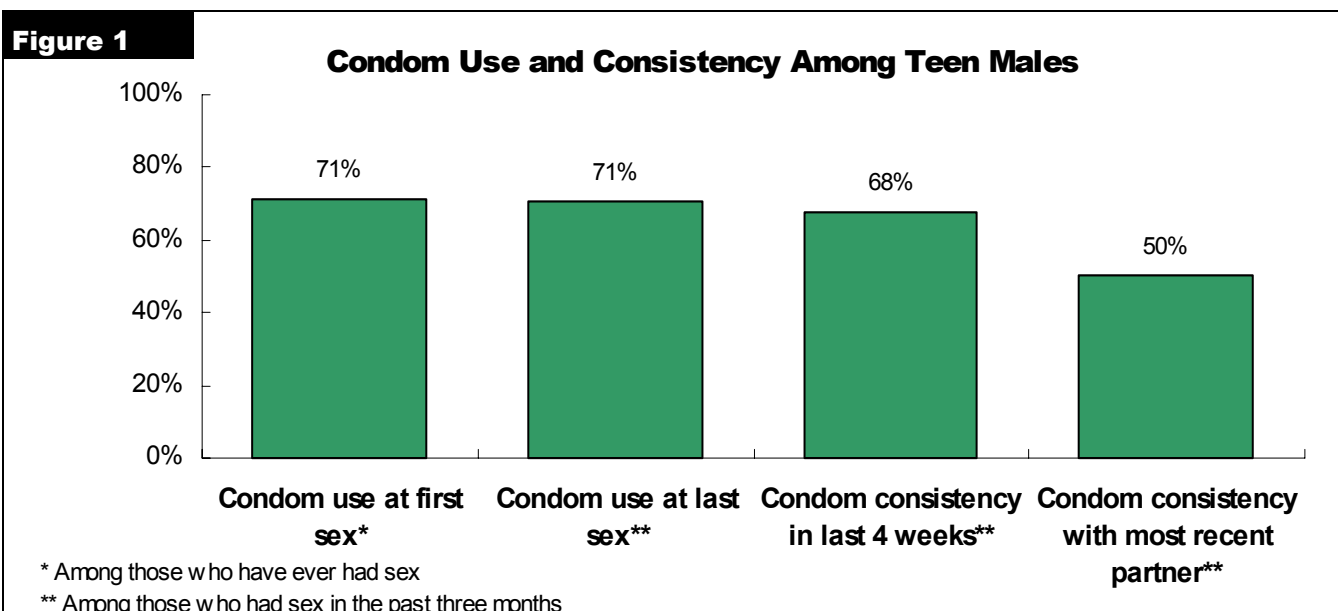
BACKGROUND

Teens in the United States have high rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and recent data indicate that U.S. teens are engaging in riskier sexual behaviors. Male adolescents can help to lower these rates and risks by using condoms consistently with their sexual partners. Child Trends drew on national survey data from 15- to 19-year-old males to examine condom use and consistency among teen males and how these patterns may be influenced by partner and relationship characteristics, access to sex education, and individual attitudes. This Fact Sheet presents these findings. A key intent of this research was to broaden understanding about how multiple dimensions of teen males' lives are associated with condom use and consistency. This understanding, in turn, can inform public policy, service delivery, and other strategies to help teens better protect themselves against STIs and pregnancy.

FINDINGS

Seven in 10 teen males reported using a condom at their first and at their most recent sexual experience, but fewer reported using condoms consistently.

- Seventy-one percent of teen males reported using a condom the first and most recent time that they had sexual intercourse. (Figure 1).
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of sexually active teen males (those who had sex in the three months prior to the survey interview) used condoms consistently in the past month.
- In contrast, just one-half of sexually active teen males reported using a condom consistently with their most recent sexual partner.



About the Research Source for this *Fact Sheet*

This *Fact Sheet* is based on an article titled “Condom Use and Consistency Among Male Adolescents in the United States,” published in the October 2008 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health* and written by Jennifer Manlove, Erum Ikramullah, and Elizabeth Terry-Humen at Child Trends. The authors analyzed data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), a nationally representative survey of men and women between the ages of 15 and 44, conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics. The NSFG collects data on sexual and partner histories, contraceptive use, and individual and family background factors. Child Trends examined how family, individual, sex education, and partner characteristics were associated with condom use and consistency among a sample 542 teen males between the ages of 15 and 19 who had ever engaged in sexual intercourse.

Teen males who have received any formal sex education instruction have higher levels of condom use and consistency.

- Receiving any type of formal sex education instruction was linked with higher levels of condom use at the first sexual experience and with condom consistency (in the past four weeks). (Figure 2).
- Whether sex education included information about abstinence or about contraception did not seem to make a difference when it came to condom use and consistency. The critical factor associated with using condoms and using them consistently seemed to be simply the presence of *any* formal instruction.
- However, among males who had had sexual intercourse, one in five did not receive formal sex education about either abstinence or contraception before his first sexual experience. This finding underscores the need to target sex education messages at teens *before* they have sex as a way to encourage them to use condoms.

Condom use and consistency are lower among older teen males and those in longer relationships.

- Older teen males and those in longer sexual relationships were less likely to use condoms at their most recent sexual experience and were less likely to use condoms consistently over time and/or across relationships (Figure 2), perhaps because of a greater likelihood that a partner would be using a more effective method of pregnancy prevention, such as the pill.
- Indeed, analyses of the survey data found that a partner’s use of contraception was linked with lower condom use and consistency, but relationship length and age at last sex remained important predictors of condom use even after controlling for their partner’s contraception use.
- Many teens do not know the sexual history of their partners, especially those whose partners engage in risky sexual behaviors. Consequently, all teens—male and female—need to be educated about the importance of maintaining consistent condom use over time and across relationships.

Figure 2

The Association Between Individual Characteristics, Sex Education, Sexual History & Partner Characteristics, and Condom Attitudes with Condom Use and Consistency Outcomes

	Used Condom at First Sex	Used Condom at Last Sex	Used Condom 100% of Time For Sex With Last Partner	Used Condom 100% of the Time For Sex In Last 4 Weeks
Formal sex education instruction	+	0	0	+
Older age at first/ last sex	0	-	0	-
Longer sexual relationship	N/A	-	-	-
Partner used contraceptive method	-	0	-	0
Had older partner (vs. Same age partner)	0	-	-	-
Casual partner (vs. Going steady)	-	0	0	0
Positive attitudes toward condoms	N/A	+	+	+

*A plus sign indicates a positive association between male adolescent characteristics and condom use outcomes; a minus sign indicates a negative association between male adolescent characteristics and condom use outcomes; a "0" indicates there is no association between male adolescent characteristics and condom use outcomes.

Teen males with older sexual partners and in casual sexual relationships are less likely to use condoms.

- Teen males whose most recent sexual partners were older were less likely to use condoms the most recent time that they had sex and were less likely to use condoms consistently than were their peers who had closer-age sexual partners. (Figure 2).
- Having a casual first sexual partner was linked with a lower likelihood of using a condom at the first sexual experience than was being in a steady relationship.
- Nearly one-fourth (23 percent) of teen males had an older recent partner and more than one-third (35 percent) were in a casual relationship with their first sexual partner.
- These findings suggest that STI prevention programs should incorporate role-playing exercises to help sexual partners develop communication and negotiation skills around condom and contraceptive use. These skills will be particularly important for teens in casual relationships or in relationships with older partners.

Positive attitudes about using condoms are associated with higher levels of condom use and consistency.

- Teen males who disagree with the ideas that condoms reduce physical pleasure and that it would be embarrassing to discuss condom use with a new partner have higher levels of condom use and consistency. This is also the case for teen males who agree that a new partner would appreciate it if they use a condom. (Figure 2).

- These findings suggest that programs and medical providers should target messages at teen males to promote more positive attitudes about condoms. The messages can aim to increase awareness of the benefits associated with using condoms, improve motivations to use condoms, and help teen males to become more comfortable discussing condom use with a new partner.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although condom use among teen males is fairly high, one out of three is not using a condom the first or most recent time he has sex and one out of two is not using condoms consistently in his most recent sexual relationship. Inconsistent condom use increases the risk of STIs and potentially unintended pregnancy. The study on which this *Fact Sheet* is based found that multiple dimensions of a male teen's life influence his condom use and consistency. Increasing access to formal sex education, reducing the number of risky sexual partners, maintaining condom use and consistency in longer relationships, and improving attitudes about condom use are all promising strategies for improving male involvement in contraceptive use within relationships and reducing high rates on teen pregnancy and STIs in the United States.

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